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ABSTRACT

The "assimilation perspective" on minority group relations in America distort empirical reality because of two hidden assumptions. First, divergence or difference is recognized at an earlier point--only to be corrected by equalization of opportunity. The second tends to view the "new world"--the assimilated--as homogeneous. The cumulative effect of the Civil War was to lead to a legal perception of the black man as a person, while the social perception of him as property persisted with behavior tending toward the latter. The second world, however, would have emerged apart from this discrepancy--in part because black men came to the U.S. in chains. Every black family must teach its young and help them to develop a strategy to cope with being black in America. It is clear now that strategies of culture deprivation--compensatory education, Head Start, Upward Bound, etc.--are doomed to fail. The failure comes as a result of the belief that the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors of blacks are pathological deviations from a superior white life style. The emergence of a "black life style" is, however, a result of social reality. Deviance and deprivation are misleading constructs, implying that blacks can be something they cannot be, namely white. [Because of the print quality of the original, this document will be only marginally legible in microfiche and xerox hard copy.] (Author/JM)

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AMERICA, A PLURALISTIC COMMUNITY: MYTH OR FACT

by

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Introduction

The belief in inevitable assimilation of all peoples in America has tended to distort America the real world. Parks (1950) states "In the relations of races, there is a cycle which tends everywhere to repeat itself.... The race relations cycle which takes the form....of contact, competition, accommodation, and eventual assimilation, is apparently progressive and irreversible.... Racial barriers may slacken the tempo of the movement, but cannot change its direction." This belief in assimilation was shared by Myrdal (1944). He wrote, "we assume it is to the advantage of American Negroes as individuals and as a group to become assimilated into American culture, to acquire the traits held in esteem by the dominant white Americans."

Implicit in the assimilation perspective are two hidden assumptions. First, is the recognition of divergence or difference at an earlier point corrected, however, by equalization of opportunity. The second tends to view the "new world"--the assimilated--as homogeneous. It is the contention of this paper that the homogeneous perspective, equality of opportunity notwithstanding, denies empirical reality in America. As a result of one denial negative consequences result for persons from different backgrounds. What accounts for the different backgrounds?

Sociological History

Phase I

Different structural arrangements emerged because one of the requirements for membership in the supposed homogeneous white culture was low-visibility. Black men are quite the obverse. They are highly visible. That is to say, they don't blend into the social fabric, hence we stand out, if you will, like a sore thumb. This recognized by Dubois (1961) at the turn of the century when he claimed, "It is a peculiar sensation; this double consciousness, this sense of looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness he proclaimed--an American, a Black man, two souls--two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals.... In short, the inability to become a member in one structure produced at least one other structure.* This other structure has persisted in part because the membership rule of whiteness exists, even today. Moreover, it is sanctioned. Thus, structural twoness, given the dimension of time has led to cultural twoness.** Johnson and Sanday (1971) put the argument like this. Where structural pluralism exists, cultural pluralism will also exist. Cultural pluralism develops as an adaptive response to structural pluralism. The extent of its persistence is a function of the

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* Structure refers to an ordered arrangemant of parts.

** Culture is the beliefs, values, attitudes as well as the behavior which determines and gives direction to a given group's style of living.

length of time a group of people have endured separation from the mainstream culture. Effectiveness is related to the coping and survival power of the cultural reportoir of the new emergent in terms of the situation that must be dealt with because of one separate condition.

History tells us, further, that the separation for Black men began on the first day of their arrival to these shores. Black men, unlike others who migrated to these shores, came in chains. Every attempt once here, was made to destroy their African cultural heritage. The only thing that can be honestly said about the attempt at decimation, is that that cultural heritage, uneven, abused, muted, aborted, sometimes transformed, and certainly differentially manifested served initially as the only repertoire of experiences to give social meaning to the facts of American life for blacks--the inability to meet the membership requirement hence domination and control, in the main, by symbols, values, and expectational-sets external to it--a separate world. The heritage of that repertoire, this paper contends, is still very much with us even today. It will persist into the future "equalization of opportunity," notwithstanding, because of the experience of Black men in this country. What has been the nature of that experience?

Phase II

Bennett (1970) states it succintly. America has never dealt with the question of the Black man. Johnson and Penick

(1971) likens America's approach to the question to that of a chameleon on a Scotch plaid field--he can't change colors fast enough. The legal and social perception of the Black man were congruent for the first 238 years. The Black man was property. He was treated as such. The wedding of the perceptions was officially consummated in Dred Scott, 1857. The moral dilemma which Myrdal didn't quite understand is the one that results from the discrepancy between the legal and social perception. This discrepancy has existed since the Civil War.

The cumulative effects of the war period 1860-1876, was to lead to a legal perception of the Black man as a person, while the social perception of him as property persisted with behavior tending toward the latter. It is the differential perception between the social and legal view of the Black man that creates the dilemma. We know what the situation is, yet we have created myths--homogeneity--and norms of evasion--equal opportunity strategies, to handle the dilemma. But as one reviews the situation that emerges from the perceptual discrepancy and resulting expectations and behaviors, what emerges is the realization that the second world would have emerged apart from the discrepancy created by the disjunction between the social and legal perception in part because Black men came in chains. Every Black family must teach its young and help them to develop a strategy to cope with being Black in America. It is clear now that strategies of culture deprivation - compensatory education, Head Start, Upward Bound, Model Cities, etc., are doomed to fail no matter who the

advocates are. The failure comes as a result of the belief that the attitudes, feelings and behaviors of Blacks are pathological deviations from a superior white life style. The truth of the matter is that the emergence of a "black life style" is a result of social reality. Deviance and deprivation don't even enter the picture, except as part of the evasion apparatus and the myth making that permit a degree of consistency. By buying into these constructs, we require Blacks to be somethingg they can't be, namely white. They are asked to deny their difference, a part of their cultural baggage, and given the nature of culture that represents an impossibility, in terms of both meaning and behavior. Nonetheless, they are asked to accept as it were, the white man's definition of them. Acquiescence, of course, contributes to the myth that difference is a quirk and indirection supports assimilation - an assimilation undergirded by beliefs in homogeneity.

The theoretical foundations of this paper eloquently articulated with historical prescience by Dubois, are supported empirically. Using methods ranging from the case study approach--Hannerz (1969), and Keil (1966)--and including experimental design approaches; Johnson and Sanday (1971), Penick (1970), Henderson (1967), and Williams (1964) here are the findings.

H Hannerz states it is hard to avoid the conclusion that there is a cultural element involved in the sex roles of streetcorner males...streetcorner men certainly are aware of the male ideal of mainstream America...and now and then everyone of them states

it as his own ideal. What we find, he concludes, is a bicultural situation. Mainstream culture and ghetto specific culture provide different models for living; models familiar to everyone in the ghetto.

Keil emphasizes the concept of soul in his work. It is defined by three dimensions as articulated by Hibbler: "having been hurt by a woman," being brought up on that "old time religion" and "know what the slavery shit is all about."

Johnson and Sanday concluded from their data that cultural heterogeneity among the poor is more applicable. They go on to state that the Black life style structure has emerged as a result of the adaptation Black people have had to make to being continually barred from strategic status positions and resources as a result of disequal opportunity and their inability to blend, i.e., their color.

Penick found a statistically significant difference in the scores of Blacks and whites on a questionnaire designed to assess one's knowledge of Afro-American life styles. The results obtained showed that most Blacks had far more information than whites - a pattern exactly opposite that found for Blacks and whites on standardized tests (e.g., SAT, GRE), which obviously reflect the salient components of the white culture. Further, he found, no systematic differences in terms of socio-economic measures.

Henderson shows that ghetto youth tend to perform very much alike on such measures of social performance as educational

achievement, law-violating behavior, aspirations, and perception of life chances and that this is one case when poverty and non-poverty families are compared as well as when youngsters from intact families are compared to youngsters from broken families. He attributes this to the common experience of being born and raised Black and the social meaning of that experience.

Williams in his work found that Blacks tend to belong to all-Negro churches, all-black voluntary organization, all-black information groups. Moreover, they tend to experience the bulk of their social interaction with other local Negroes, despite possible interracial contacts in their work, school, and shopping life. By reversing things one can conclude that whites in the main interact and correspond with whites only.

What we are suggesting in summary then is that

a) difference, structural and cultural, is real,

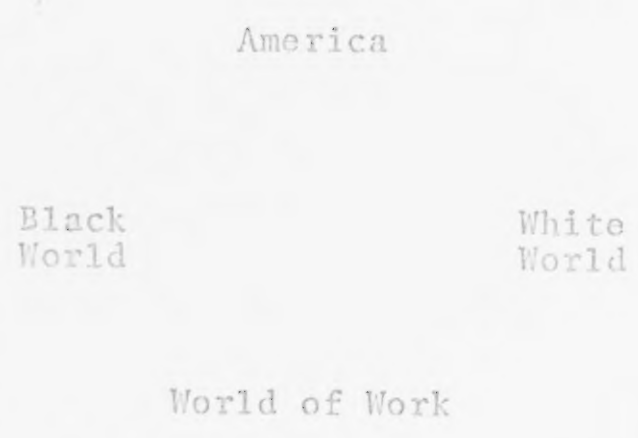
b) difference implies a condition of pluralism,

c) pluralism implies the possibility for conflict.

America, then, in the broadest sense, is composed of two structural worlds in terms of the conduct of men's relationships. The implications of this dualness would appear to be clear. Any social system built on a uni (homogeneous) model, is bound to fail in terms of servingg the needs of the culturally different. The school as presently articulated, is built on such a model. Where we need to go is at least to a system that takes into account multiple structural arrangements. Sanday (1971) has captures the essence of this position in her taxonomic scheme presented below.

The typology makes it clear that you can only be culturally deprived in terms of the world in which you operate. This leads to the question of implications of diversity for the school and the teacher, if America is indeed two worlds as diagrammed in Figure II.

Figure II.



Implications

The diagram reveals two open systems operating in America. The open character allows for points of similarity in both systems. However, the walls insure difference. Thus, it would appear to be folly to have a school built on a uni-model of any magnitude. The diagram and typology suggests also the possibility for conflict in the school. The current uni-model tends

to deny such. Conflict does abound. Take Dade County for example. The ruling of the courts has made it impossible to have a predominantly or all-black staff in a school unit, yet the same courts permit open enrollment at the high school level at least, thus enabling whites to flee to predominantly white schools, while Blacks are trapped in predominantly Black schools, with predominantly white staffs. When I further observed the basketball teams in the Florida State finals, which by and large consisted of Black ball players, even at schools which in some instances are 95% white, the conflict potential emerges. On the one hand performance dictates certain status options which are denied on the other on the basis of color. Alternatively, you cantake Pittsburgh with its dividing geography yet the schools transcend the geography; thus the division is played out in the school resulting in conflict overt and covert.

Despite these realities teachers and administrators are ill-equipped to handle conflict. Moreover, they know little about how to use it creatively. To use cultural deprivation strategies is self defeating. They give the illusion of speaking to one dimension of the problem - equal opportunity. But, as articulated presently, there is still that commitment to homogeneity thus washing out the possibility of alternative structural arrangements. Equal opportunity strategies must at first accept the condition of difference, then build

a) to systematically include those who have been denied access, and

b) once included, build support systems to insure success. The student parity principle of the Graduate School of Social Work, is an example of (a). The AF-TEC proposals to General Foods are an example of both, as well as the School of Urban and Public Affairs at Carnegie-Mellon University's approach to Black admissions. Differences then must be dealt with because they exist. These implications raise at least two additional relevant school issues: what is the process model and what is the contract governing that model?

Since there are two worlds, the school process must reflect that. That process must now assume multiple inputs, build multiple structures which will lead ideally to a homo/hetero output. The contract which effects the process, must also reflect difference and be multiple too. Stated in another way, since learning is a transmission process, cultural difference calls our attention to the fact that this transmission process must be different in the various communities which a school system serves. The contract must also be varied. If various communities are brought together, then one must understand that the model must vary if the school is to be effective for the diverse population which it is expected to serve.

Those who have heaped excoriating criticism on the schools, have been essentially arguing this position without the framework herein presented. Herbert Kohl is arguing about the nature of the contract. Belle Kaufmann too. Leonard, Hentoff, Kozol and Coles, are arguing about the nature of the process. They say

to move a student from X to Y, you must begin where he, the student, is, that is to say you must consider the social repertoire which the student brings to the situation. Here, the reading teacher is absolutely key. It is the reading teacher, through his/her very function, that can begin to introduce students to the diversity that abounds, thus establishing the beginnings of a multiple process perspective.

I have long argued that it is difficult to establish an authoritarian contract for learning, i.e., one in which the adults make all the decisions in a setting where the learner's decisions of the previous night were crucial to his very presence in the classroom today. A student put it eloquently at a recent meeting, "My mom always taught us kids," he said, " that despite our color and the fact that we were poor, we could put water and soap on our a--." "For anyone to think that us kids would go to class after gym, without soap and water, was ridiculous, not to speak of the rap that the broads would put on a dude who stunk." What I am hearing is either a shorter gym period or tardy for the next period. Both options inappropriate in a uni-model structure.

Summary

I have built an empirical case which shows the existence of multiple communities. In short, pluralistic communities are a fact. For practitioners, it is necessary that they be aware of this diversity and how to communicate it; a function of the reading teacher, particularly if they are to be successful in operating a transmission process. At base, that process is intended to bring man from where he is to places about which he may have only dreamed.

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